

Washington's Wild Future

A Partnership for Fish and Wildlife

Spokane Valley Regional Forum

September 30, 2015

The following public comments were offered by participants at an open forum on fish and wildlife issues sponsored by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) at Center Place in Spokane Valley. Approximately 70 participants attended the event, one of six regional forums conducted around the state.

Agency management

- Promote more other WA outdoor activities
- More science-based management, less political
- Economic impact of wildlife viewing is HUGE! Much greater than hunting/fishing, so involve us non-hunting/fishing folks with outreach and more volunteer opportunities so we can support WDFW better
- WDFW should mediate between hunting/fishing groups and environmental groups; work as a team
- Improve/increase the use of volunteers
- Good meeting format
- Tax payers pay for wildlife; keep control and management of it
- Recommend the agency assign an Olympia representative for the director on the Compact
- Emphasize existing partnerships, such as Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups (RFEG)
- Fix your website. It's awful and not user friendly. Use public focus groups as your product reviewer before you release a re-design
- Website is horrible. It's hard to find license information, especially fees. Also very difficult to find information fishermen would need – location of boat launches, campgrounds, services for anglers
- Increase transparency and openness
- Educate public on how to be responsible in the outdoors (i.e., emergency preparedness, clothing, etc.)
- Design personnel strategies that allow agency staff to develop long-term relationships with the land and people
- Better communication from headquarters to regions
- Make the work you do more available to the public (i.e., Woody Myers' deer study)

- Partnerships exist with RFEGs; improve RFEG revenue stream to increase total project and community value
- Too much bureaucracy – make a decision and move forward
- Work with Legislature to prevent lawsuits
- Improve communications about WDFW science to the public through social media
- Need outreach to intensely urban public
- Really appreciate working with WDFW – best department in state!
- Appreciate collaboration with Audubon and Land Trusts
- Economic impact – “dollars per day expended” – varies throughout the state and is meaningless in low-income counties
- Need to include and involve more non-fisher/hunter publics to gain more support from what is the majority of fish & wildlife recreationists; involve more as volunteers to make more friends and supporters
- Offended by term “stakeholder;” prefer “resident of state of WA”
- Don’t have outreach meetings during hunting season
- Volunteer programs support WDFW experts, very much appreciated in college courses
- Have pledge of allegiance at start of listening session
- Like efforts at openness
- Appreciate the spirit of this initiative: for the strength of partnership between Snake River Salmon Recovery board and WDFW.
- Manage all interests, not just fishing & hunting interests
- Maintain collaborations with organizations like the Inland Northwest Land Conservancy; hope new director Unsworth maintains former director Anderson’s stance in not backing down from those who attempt to villainize land protection partnership work

Enforcement

- Conduct enforcement stings for public land stealing of cameras, hunting stands
- Give more tickets instead of (less) warnings
- Increase number of enforcement officers statewide
- Recommend the WDFW Enforcement division emphasize enforcement and protection of ESA species over or more than on abundant game/fish populations
- Enforcement needs to look at adults fishing without kids at juvenile-only fishing lakes like Bear Lake in north Spokane County
- Appreciate Enforcement response to wildlife conflict issues
- Need to fill enforcement vacancies

- Why won't your enforcement officers ticket those who abuse the resource? People who don't perfectly pinch the barbs on their hooks are getting tickets, but people who fish out of season or poach huge numbers of fish are not penalized
- Publish enforcement phone numbers that allow callers to reach an actual person, especially on weekends.

Fish management

- Agency should value recreational and commercial fishing commensurate with their economic value; recreational fishing generates more economic value
- Support Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) checks with boat safety checks
- Promote destination travel fisheries
- Increase number of two-pole rivers
- Allocate trout properly (triploids mostly to westside)
- Organize fisheries strategically to create destination fisheries
- Address avian (cormorant, pelican) predation on fish to provide better opportunities for anglers and to be more cost effective (less fry loss)
- Recommend the agency inform the Fish & Wildlife Commission on the inequity of recreational fishing opportunities above/below Bonneville and request the Commission to take this into consideration when it reconsiders 75/25 policy.
- Review 75/25 Columbia River spring chinook allocation impacts in upriver part of lower river management
- In select fisheries, grow larger kokanee – they are 11-inches everywhere
- Continue to recognize large economic benefit of southeast WA anadromous fisheries
- Free fishing day license for special-needs individuals (part of a rehab program for recovering addicts, etc.). Get them hooked on fishing – one time, one week. Be more inclusive to get more into outdoor activities
- Emphasize implementation of redband trout conservation agreement – transparency needed
- Non-native species should be managed as invasive species, not as game fish
- Free fishing license for kids 17 and younger
- Improve measurement of angler success (opportunity and time on water for sustainability)
- Expand wild stock gene banking to other native species (i.e., redbands)
- Limitations needed on outfitters and guides, by river sections or time on water
- Address issues between fishermen and rafters
- Appreciate the Region 1 staff advancing the de-regulation of small mouth bass, walleye and catfish in the Snake river

- Need better population baselines for species so we can make informed management decisions
- Improve fishing, boating access everywhere; top priorities are Amber Lake, Browns Lake
- Research impacts of drought/climate change on water supplies at fish hatcheries
- Add maps to Fish Washington

Regulations

- Fishing rules are too complicated, simplify the rule pamphlet
- Current regs are so complex that many people don't go fishing. They aren't confident they understand what's permitted
- Regulations sometimes give directions that require anglers to have local and sometimes historical knowledge. Those who are new to an area sometimes break the rules without knowing it
- One stop shop to find fishing e-regs and closures
- Provide more maps that support complicated rules
- Standardize how the rules require measuring fish length
- Fishing pamphlet isn't well-organized. Hard to find information about specific bodies of water
- See consistency in fishing regs for major portions of Spokane River (from state line to Plese Flats)
- Simplify rules with consistency in free flowing sections of rivers
- Need more efficient distribution of rule pamphlets
- Department doesn't give enough advance notice of emergency rule changes
Everyone should get rule change information at the same time. That isn't happening now, with some people getting advance information from WDFW staff

Rehabilitation

- Staff need to ensure the sustainability of the rotenone program
- Rehab entropied lakes (e.g. Eloika Lake). Drain and excavate private companies will do it, no state needed
- Stop messing around and protect and fix habitat in lowland lakes. Dredge and restore lakes for fish; clean up peat moss, weeds, logs

Spokane River

- Spokane River, state line to Plese Flats, should be catch-and-release for salmonids
- Allow keeping non-native smallmouth bass in Spokane River

Sprague Lake

- Concerned about fish habitat, water quality, water levels; need more complexity to improve fishery (bluegills, minnows, etc.); illegal water use by agriculture
- Harper Island fishing closure regs need to be looked at; currently year-round closure. Southwest shoreline closed year-round, but near-shore lily pad area should be open to fishing. Winter fishing closure on southwest end should be lifted
- Submerged fish habitat – would like to see WDFW & volunteers install structures
- If WDFW can fund boat launching dock, should also spend money to improve fish habitat
- walleye fishing plan for? Or perch?
- Need to do better job promoting our GREAT fisheries: 1. Largemouth bass 2. Rainbow trout 3. Steelhead 4. Channel catfish
- If promoting fishing activities, be aware of limitations on local emergency services – Sprague Lake is on county line, with long response time
- Regulations confusing; steelhead in Sprague Lake are part of trout limit, no steelhead card needed

Funding

- Find way to incorporate funding from non-hunters, non-fishers (i.e., wildlife viewers) through unique tag or fee structure; (Walla Walla community group studying resource use economics recently included USFWS survey numbers that show non-hunt/fish uses (bird watching, hiking, etc.) is a substantial economic engine and that the number of these types of recreationists eclipses hunter/fisher constituency; WDFW should focus more on engaging this group and not just the hook-and-bullet folks
- Address funding shortfalls associated with Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups (RFEGs), specifically funds allocated through license sales. Legislation does not address inflation and reduced buying powers
- For RFEG program, the funding provided by the state currently produces a benefit of \$7 for each \$1 funded, so continue and possibly increase funding of RFEG
- Get revenue from wildlife watching
- Hiking, backpacking, birding, etc. opportunities are hidden secrets – how to bring in more \$\$ from all, especially out-of-staters
- Increase funding with tax on all outdoor recreation equipment
- Determine gap in Pittman-Robertson funds and figure out how to fill it
- Expand support base to non-consumptive users to share the funding load when Pittman-Robertson funds decline
- Try to spread the cost of supporting the resource and WDFW management with tax on binoculars or other equipment used by non-hunters/fishers
- Continue collaboration with organizations like the Inland Northwest Land Conservancy to protect fish and wildlife habitat and species with cooperative funding
- Develop palatable method for accessing funding from ALL state residents

Wildlife management

Hunting (general)

- Certify Master Hunters (MH) on different weapon types to participate in firearm restricted damage hunts- topic for MH Advisory Group
- Flexibility on local firearm restrictions
- Help with outreach to explain benefits of antler point restrictions to get acceptance with broader hunting community
- Increase harvest of deer & elk from multi-season tags
- Master hunter/archery season crossover issues & extend archery season
- Simplify hunting pamphlet so that newcomers to the state can understand it. Make it searchable on-line
- Do away with tag purchase for special permits. Other western states don't do this (e.g., purchasing of tag prior to special permit draws)
- Hunting tags should be good statewide; don't require east/west split
- Don't require weapon choice
- Allow salvage tags for road-killed ungulates, bears
- Appreciate special hunting permit process and ability to accumulate points in multiple categories; keep prices stable
- Keep big game permit draw system
- Need hunting regs to come out Jan. 1
- Support current multiple drawing opportunities without losing points in other categories when drawn for a specific permit hunt
- Develop "loyalty program" for permit applicants who have applied for the same species permit hunts over time (i.e., get an extra point after 5 consecutive years of application)
- Create ability to transfer hunt application points to other applicants if or when a hunter stops hunting or at least applying for special permits
- Big thumbs up for the Go Hunt program – kudos!! Good website, good landowner participation, great overall program & implementation
- Encourage maintaining & growing hunting reservation and feel free to hunt programs
- No use of trail cameras during hunting season
- Any businesses coming here to guide handicapped hunters? What laws pertain to that?
- Need laws to protect handicapped hunters
- Increase regulations on hunting guides
- Separate sea duck and puddle duck bag limits
- Protect native species biodiversity
- Put bounty on coyotes

- Use infrared sensing for wildlife species counts (“pay it forward”)
- Better feedback on wildlife reporting to the public
- Trappers need to be involved in setting trapping regulations
- Suggest a wildlife water enhancement program for Eastern WA to build new and maintain existing guzzler stations to benefit chukar, pheasants, deer, and other wildlife; put a “guzzler tax” (\$1) on hunting licenses to fund; see Nevada& Utah programs for lots of good ideas (over 1,000 guzzlers built since inception there)
- Protect more diverse species and habitats
- Increased predator numbers affecting deer & elk populations
- Need better population baselines for species so we can make informed management decisions
- Restore pronghorn
- Eliminate or address the “silos” (mind-sets) with management of game animals (example: beavers)
- Streamline permitting for trapping and relocating beavers

Baiting

- Ban baiting for all hunting
- Regulate baiting or just no baiting
- No big game baiting for commercial guides
- Do away with all baiting
- Don’t take away baiting
- Do away with baiting ; can create problems for ESA-listed species, ethics of hunting

Bear/ cougar

- Increase cougar harvest in GMUs 145-149 in addition to Blue Mountains
- General spring bear season
- Consistent fall bear season dates
- Over the counter spring bear tag sales
- Revisit carnivore harvest in mountainous regions and Stevens County to restore ungulate populations (whitetailed and mule deer)
- Over the counter spring black bear tags
- Bring back bear baiting
- Allow hound hunting for cougar and bear
- Want general spring season for black bears
- Increase cougar harvest guidelines; punishes cougars instead of wolves
- Manage cougar population down

Deer

- Concern about WTD fawn recruitment, in particular in Wedge and GMU101.
- Concern about goat weed and causing harm to WTD population.
- Antler point restriction to help with providing mature bucks
- Deer- create species specific tags for deer as well as general tag.
- Second buck tag for non-resident price
- Bluetongue impact to ungulates should be incorporated into harvest management
- Emergency shutdown of doe hunting due to bluetongue
- In Cheney unit, move muzzleloader from early start to December to avoid fire hazard and have buck harvest in December
- Research question to address: Does goat weed adversely affect fawn survival through Anthra quinone (a photo-toxin in thin-skinned animals), creating lesions in fawns?
- Bring back whitetail 4-antler-point restrictions in GMUs 117 & 121
- Continue region-wide 3-pt. harvest restrictions in mule deer buck harvest
- Support any whitetail buck harvest in northeast Washington
- Improve hunting opportunities, both antlerless in large populations or quality buck hunts through a draw
- Explain why 3-antler-pt. minimum needed, why we want to increase mature bucks, etc.
- Open doe season near Hwy. 2 where too many does are hit by vehicles

Elk

- Elk hunting east vs. west: be able to switch east/west if you are not drawn for special permit in first selected location
- Create ability to apply for eastern or western WA elk permits without have to select eastern or western tags; applicant can select elk tag region following the permit drawing
- Re-define the word “quality” for elk hunting
- Don’t like spike-only for Yakima & Colockum elk hunting

Non-game wildlife

- Pelican shootings on Columbia River- Badger Island north to Foundation Island – is this being investigated?
- More wildlife and bird viewing areas and nature interpretive trails
- WDFW has a responsibility to protect and conserve habitat for non-game and small game species
- Respect all wildlife species and protect all habitats

- Invest more resources in watchable wildlife marketing
- Pollinator conservation; Monarch butterfly habitat
- Concerns about Lower Columbia bird species

Turkeys

- Turkey compete with native grouse- liberalize turkey hunting season to benefit other species.
- Turkeys need to go. Reduce turkey population due to impacts to native wildlife
- Turkeys cover lots of ground now, maybe lower tag fee or give away tags to reduce numbers
- Have a fall general season on turkeys and lower the cost of the tags
- Treat wild turkeys as invasive species; they compete with native grouse species

Habitat management

- Dedicate time to partner with conservation districts to provide more habitat projects with private landowners
- Clean farming practices reducing habitat, thus decreasing biodiversity
- Log state lands to decrease wildfire risk
- Southeast WA salmon/steelhead habitat recovery projects should be an agency priority because of the large economic benefit
- Protect native biodiversity
- Preserve & build habitat connectivity
- Create more habitat by working with local hunting & fishing clubs and invoke “coordination” via federal law which requires coordination and mediation
- Need more input into land development early in the process
- Improve Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA) process
- Mt. Spokane ski area expansion: Public hasn’t paid attention to WDFW and Parks have violated own rules; Lands Council has lawsuit to protect decision of Parks Commission to go forward, regardless of evidence; Parks needs to review
- Habitat protection is the most important thing we can do
- Make sure CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) lands are providing functional habitat
- Focus efforts on channeled scablands in the Palouse
- Rock Lake shoreline development proposal (yachts, million-dollar-homes, etc.) needs to be stopped!; Rock Lake should be protected as a park
- Need habitat partnerships with farmers
- Work to anticipate habitat changes with prolonged droughts, climate change; research effects with modeling (i.e., how will wetland habitats change in eastern

WA?). Are we thinking ahead about drought/climate change and population growth effects?

Land management

- Do not privatize management of wildlife areas and boat access sites
- Open 4-0 Ranch to more hunting
- Allow more flexibility in sub-dividing parcels to allow larger parcels to stay in working lands and concentrate development on a usable/flexible parcel
- Garfield, Columbia, Walla Walla counties closing access to >20,000 acres
- Need more outreach/education on vegetation types, especially native species
- Need a new boat launch at Vernita NOW!
- Get public access to Chapman Lake
- Fix Rock Lake boat ramp – makes lake unfishable
- Reardan Audubon Lake Wildlife Area (and other areas): Keep invasives (like Russian olive) out; removing cattle could be detrimental, consider using cattle for habitat management (pulling cattle off becomes an emotional issue without basis in fact)
- Take over federal lands; push for health of forests
- Improve access to wildlife areas with trails, seeking grants
- Maintain or improve public access to shorelines & natural areas
- Fix PILT so local communities are receiving full \$\$ from WDFW lands
- Discover Pass is a disaster; some folks can't afford to pay twice
- Don't like timber harvest on WDFW land during hunting seasons
- Provide more outward support of hunters & hunting on WDFW lands towards other recreationists
- Need to be responsible with lands regarding fire districts and emergency response impacts
- Be hesitant to remove lands from tax base in rural counties
- Cowichee access – cabin owners are blocking off public access
- Like snowmobiles
- Take a good look at all water access sites to assess needs for improvement (i.e., potholes in parking lots, broken concrete slabs at boat ramps, etc.); bathrooms are very nice and clean!
- More handicapped access sites for fishing; need concrete slabs for someone with unstable walking, sidewalk for bank fishing, and better advertisement of these sites
- Add ADA access to West Medical Lake and Sprague Lake
- Signs are missing in some WDFW locations, and a lot of the signage is outdated

Grazing

- Use grazing to help manage fuel loads and ecological objectives; in some cases, may need to pay for grazing to occur due to the high management costs of herd supervision/rotation
- Increase standards on riparian grazing to increase biodiversity
- Increase grazing on wildlife areas to manage fuel loads

Weeds

- Invasive weeds and spread by ATVs
- Non-native species introduction via motorized recreation
- Need greater focus on invasive species overall

Licensing

- Develop licensing app (smart phone app) for hunting tags, catch record cards, other documents
- License dealers need more training
- Cost of WA fishing license versus Idaho fishing license
- Kudos to Olympia customer service helping with special hunting permits, above and beyond
- Over-the-counter sales of multi-season licenses
- Make it cheap to take beginners fishing. The department would benefit by reducing the cost for newcomers or by letting them fish free for a limited period of time

Wildlife conflict

- More tools to protect property from predators
- Assertive management of predators
- Create more carcass pits to not attract predators
- Information and education for neighbors about local species affecting them, especially moose, bear
- Better educate public on how to live with wildlife in rural/suburban areas
- WDFW needs to consider the livestock producers and understand that the loss of one single livestock animal can be more economically devastating than not harvesting an elk
- Explore additional techniques for allowing us to co-exist with wildlife
- Explore options such as barriers (i.e., human presence, fox lights) for protecting and deterring injury of animals
- Use the term “working landscapes” more often and consider humans as part of the ecosystem
- Need more deer crossing signs

- Connect Wildlife Control Operators with beaver relocation/restoration program organizations; concerned that beavers are just being euthanized when could be useful elsewhere

Wolf management

- More wolf biologists to help trap and radio collar to monitor a growing wolf population
- Educate ranchers regarding techniques on how to avoid/minimize conflicts with wolves
- Disband Wolf Advisory Group
- Wolves have a place but need to be managed
- Initiate wolf protocol to remain proactive on management
- Plan to dis-habituate wolves from populated areas
- Evaluate habitat to determine which animals would be best suited for – example: wolves versus cattle
- Replace livestock carcass pits with proper burials or predator friendly carcass removal pits
- Improve ungulate population data in NE WA so wolf impacts can be understood
- Wolf depredation: Great job working with situation that is very divisive
- Wolf Advisory Group is a waste of time, not making progress, hired consultant for a lot of money; do an assessment of where we are going and is WAG the way to get there; success would have all parties working together in going forward with mission
- We don't need wolves in WA, have more than we know (just like more grizzlies than we know); place for wolves is Yellowstone; wolves don't have a predator and we don't have good management
- We brought in bigger timber wolves from Canada, not native smaller ones
- See how wolves have decimated elk herds in central Idaho
- Wolf Advisory Group is too big, unproductive, costs too much
- Manage wolf packs to no more than five animals
- WDFW needs to follow through on commitments about Huckleberry wolf pack management; don't lie to people
- Investigate existence of wolf/coyote hybrids in NE WA
- De-list wolves regionally
- Don't close WAG meetings to public
- Look into/research coy-wolves (hybrids?)